



THE MORAL IS IN THE PRACTICE

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Introduction

Recent scholarship has substantiated the view that teaching is a moral endeavor (Ball & Wilson, 1996; Elbaz, 1992; Goodlad, Soder & Sirotnik, 1990; Hostetler, 1997; Olson, 1992; Oser, Dick & Patry 1992; Oser, 1994; Sockett, 1993). Some studies have illustrated just how diverse and extensive the moral influence of teachers can be (Boostrom, 1991; Buchmann & Floden, 1993; Jackson, Boostrom & Hansen 1993; van Manen, 1991). Others have documented the fact that many classroom teachers place moral considerations at the heart of their work (Hansen, 1995; Higgins, 1995; Kozolanka and Olson, 1994; Lyons, 1990; Simpson & Garrison, 1995). According to the literature, these teachers want to have a positive influence on their students. They want to assist them to learn, to learn how to learn, to discover their own powers and potential, this while learning to respect other people with their often quite different experiences and interests. These teachers see themselves as more than skilled technicians or knowledge conveyers operating in what Jackson (1986) calls a 'mimetic' orientation to teaching, in which students mime or mimic back the teacher's knowledge. Rather, while endorsing the important place of knowledge transmission, such teachers sense the extraordinary possibilities in their role to be a force for good: to help young people to broaden their intellectual and moral horizons, and to deepen their connection to their own minds and human capacities. While these teachers may not employ the term 'moral', they envision and talk about their work in frankly moral terms.

In contrast with this testimony from veteran practitioners, I have found in my work as

a teacher educator that introducing the idea that teaching has moral dimensions triggers diverse and sometimes disquieting reactions in teacher candidates. Some candidates embrace the idea and want to make immediate use of moral language to enrich their thinking and their rationale for teaching. They perceive value in this language for framing their hopes and their aspirations as teachers. Other teacher candidates appear frightened by the term moral. Some withdraw (at least initially) from the classroom conversation, as if their peers or their professor were poised to attack their most cherished human values, or were about to promulgate a version of the ten commandments of ethical teaching. Still other candidates become worried and troubled by the use of the term. Although not always in so many words, they suggest that talk of the moral is better left to parents or priests, and that teaching boils down to classroom discipline, instructional methods, subject matter knowledge, and other more familiar issues. Finally, some teacher candidates ask 'Whose morals are we talking about?' When invited to answer their own question, these candidates refer to differences in culture, race, class, gender, language, and more. They suggest that morals differ widely and that teachers have a profound obligation to be sensitive to this fact. Some add that teachers should be non-judgmental about morals.

Teacher candidates' initial responses to the idea of the moral mirror the confusion about the term in contemporary American society, and perhaps in other societies as well (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler & Tipton, 1985; MacIntyre, 1984; Midgley, 1991; Stout, 1988; Taylor, 1989). This confusion is both accompanied and fueled by cacophonous debate, often ill-mannered and belligerent in tone — consider the public storms

over 'family values' in the U.S. — which only compounds the predicament of new teacher candidates. They are being introduced to the idea that teaching is a moral endeavor, while also coming to their program enmeshed in and perhaps intimidated by their society's cantankerous disagreements about the very term moral.

From this perspective, their classroom comments and questions — 'Whose morals?' and 'Isn't this for parents and ministers to think about?' — are not only understandable, but can be seen as shrewd and insightful. Many teacher candidates appreciate the fact that civil conversation on moral matters is not always the norm in their society. They sense that some spokespersons for the various positions, whether from the left or the right, do not want to reason with them but want to convert them. Consequently, given the widespread societal disagreement and confusion about the meaning of the moral, teacher educators should expect a measure of wariness and hesitancy from their candidates when they address the idea that teaching is a moral activity. In my experience, this also holds for candidates educated in religious schools, who either are as confused as their peers, or are jaded about moral matters (some report having been preached at for years about them), or are ensconced in a guiding set of beliefs which lead them to wonder what all the fuss is about.

In this essay, I propose to sketch a framework on teaching as a moral activity that teacher educators might employ in responding to their candidates' concerns. I turn first to some recent arguments about the moral dimensions of teaching and what they imply for teacher education. Those viewpoints themselves reflect larger societal disagreements about the concept of the moral. A major limitation the viewpoints share is that, ironically, they can lead educators away from rather than closer to the terms of teaching. After examining why this is so, I will argue that the moral dimensions of teaching can be derived from the practice itself rather than from a theoretical or philosophical posture conceived apart from the work.

Teacher Education and the Moral Dimensions of Teaching

The research literature yields different conceptions of the moral and of what aspects of

teaching embody moral meaning. There are deontological or obligation-based views, according to which teachers should do certain things because they are right and just; aretaic or character-based views, which presume that teachers should be certain kinds of persons, e.g. caring, compassionate, thoughtful; consequentialist or outcome-based views, which state that teachers should help produce students with moral qualities like civic-mindedness or cultural sensitivity; and so forth. The plurality of moral theories brought to bear on teaching can hardly help but complicate the task faced by teacher educators who engage their candidates in thinking about the moral dimensions of the work. A recent analysis by Valli (1990) helps illustrate this point. Valli identifies three distinct approaches to 'reflective' teacher education which 'emphasize the moral foundations of teaching' (p. 39). She calls these the deliberative, the relational, and the critical. Her typology is worth attending to because it faithfully represents much of the current thinking about the moral dimensions of teaching. It will serve as a point of departure for the alternative perspective I will outline.

The first of the three approaches, which Valli associates most closely with Tom's (1984) work on teaching as a moral craft, urges teachers to think critically about their purposes and how to justify them from a moral point of view. According to the deliberative viewpoint, '[a] person who is critically reflecting does not [only] ask how to do something but, rather, if it is worthwhile, if it is good, and for whom it is good' (Valli, 1990, p. 42). Tom (1984) emphasizes that 'teaching is moral in the sense that a curriculum plan selects certain objectives or pieces of content instead of others; this selective process either explicitly or implicitly reflects a conception of desirable ends' (p. 78). Teaching is a moral endeavor, moreover, because it entails a 'subtle moral relationship between teacher and student' (p. 11) which obliges teachers to be reflective about the dominant power position they hold in the classroom (p. 78). Tom also suggests that teaching is moral because it entails 'the ability to analyze situations and to use instructional skills appropriate to these situations' (p. 11). This ability has moral overtones, for Tom, because it bears directly on the kind of influence a teacher might have on students. Tom asks us to consider a teacher weighing the use of

behavior modification with certain students. From the point of view of effectiveness, behavioral modification might succeed quite well. However, from the point of view of moral responsibility for students' overall growth, this action might produce an authoritarian atmosphere in the classroom. 'In such a case,' writes Tom, 'the teacher would have to weigh carefully the advantages of a workable classroom management system against the importance he attaches to a certain type of student-teacher relationship. Several possibilities might occur to him. Perhaps the behavior modification approach should be abandoned. Or maybe this approach can be altered ... [Or] perhaps the problem with discipline is so serious that for the time being the teacher will tolerate a student-teacher relationship not to his liking. In the end the teacher must either decide to live with the tension underlying this situation or take action to reduce it' (pp. 126-127). From Valli's (1990) perspective, in the deliberative approach the moral is not grounded in a particular theory or moral philosophy. Rather, she suggests, 'what is moral is left up to the individual teacher's judgment as it is shaped and constrained by community consensus. In many cases, the moral is intuited or guided by tacit conceptions of value' (p. 41).

Valli contrasts this perspective on the moral in teaching with the 'relational' approach, exemplified in her view by Noddings' (1984) work on caring. This approach draws upon moral philosophy and feminist theory which centers the moral life around issues of personal character and how individuals regard and treat other individuals. 'While this approach does involve moral deliberation,' Valli suggests, 'its rootedness in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness rather than in moral reasoning precludes its being subsumed under the category of moral deliberation' (p. 43). Noddings (1984) is quite critical of moral theories that privilege rationality or the use of abstract principles and codes of conduct over personal care and concern. Although she has argued (1992) that caring can be reconciled with institutional structures in school if the latter are substantially reshaped, she remains troubled by perspectives that look to institutions or programs first rather than to individuals for addressing moral needs. The 'danger' here, she writes, 'is that caring, which is essentially nonrational in that it requires a con-

stitutive engrossment and displacement of motivation, may gradually or abruptly be transformed into abstract problem solving. There is, then, a shift of focus from the cared for to the 'problem'. Opportunities arise for self-interest, and persons entrusted with caring may lack the necessary engrossment in those to be cared for' (1984, pp. 25-26). In the relational approach, according to Valli (1990), 'relationships are more important than rationality, empathetic understanding more important than abstract principles' (p. 43).

The third approach to the moral in teaching which Valli examines, named the 'critical', is heavily informed by Marxist political theory. In characterizing this approach, Valli refers to work by Adler and Goodman (1986), Apple (1979), Giroux and McLaren (1986), and others. The approach presumes that schools embody in their structure and functioning larger societal inequities and forms of injustice. Schools must therefore be radically changed. The primary moral responsibility of teachers is to engage in this transformative work, a call which gives rise to images of the teacher as 'critical pedagogue' or 'transformative intellectual' (Giroux & McLaren, 1986). These images suggest that teachers are under a moral obligation to advance the rights of the least advantaged in society, and to resist or subvert any institutional or political agendas that impede that advance. Teachers should assist students in deconstructing dominant societal ideologies and in learning to claim a voice of their own. The moral significance of teaching, in this framework, boils down to the requirement to help change institutional structures and configurations.

Valli (1990) highlights in a very useful way the differences in the three approaches, and they are striking. She discusses differences in their presumptions about social reality, about the appropriate objects of teacher reflection, and about the nature and benefits of ethical judgment. For example, she compares how teacher educators who use one or another of the approaches might talk with candidates about the issue of labeling students. 'Relational programs focus on the impact of a label on the quality of the caring relation between student and teacher. Critical programs focus on the historical context of labeling and its role in justifying and maintaining social inequality. Deliberative programs

might include both the personal and social consequences of labeling but would not necessarily use the theoretical frameworks of the other two approaches to analyze the practice. In addition, students in deliberative programs might be asked to reflect on additional aspects of labeling, such as whether labeling can have beneficial effects or how one can tell when the effects are adverse or beneficial' (p. 51). According to Valli, these contrasting strategies reflect the fact that for 'a deliberative teacher, the morally right thing is making sound judgments while acknowledging legitimate differences; for a relational teacher, it is becoming involved in the reality of the other; and for a critical teacher, it is exposing and transforming social ills' (p. 54). Thus, the three approaches differ in their assumptions both about the moral and about the moral dimensions of teaching. Valli argues that the three approaches are not easily reconcilable, making it problematic at best to presume that a teacher could be simultaneously caring, critical, and deliberative (p. 54).

Each of the approaches offers a standpoint for teacher educators to adopt in introducing candidates to the idea that teaching is a moral activity. But this statement leaves unsettled the issue of which approach to take, or, posed differently, which approach might be best or even 'more moral'. It leaves unresolved the question whether teacher educators should in fact adopt a single approach, or should, in contrast, present all three to candidates and assist them as best as possible in thinking them through. The latter course of action raises the question whether teacher educators would be tacitly adopting a fourth approach while presenting the other three. Valli's own predilections seem oriented toward a critical viewpoint, but she takes care to leave both the question and the criteria of choice of approach to the reader.

I want to respond to that opening by suggesting that all three approaches are problematic and that teacher educators are not limited to drawing upon them. Advocates of the three approaches appear to presume that teaching is a socially constructed activity. That is, they turn not to the practice of teaching for guidance in identifying its moral meaning, but rather turn first to sources outside the practice: personal values, moral philosophy, social and political ideology. 'To view teaching as a social construc-

tion', Tom (1984) writes, 'is to see teaching as a cultural artifact that evolves as people refine and redefine which knowledge, skills, and attitudes are important for future generations. At the root of the socially constructed conception of teaching, therefore, is the question of desirable ends, an endpoint that brings us back to the moral basis of teaching' (p. 96). Tom directs these remarks, in part, against the then prevailing process-product mode of research on teaching. Some researchers in that line of inquiry adopted a scientific view of social reality, regarding the researchable as, and restricting it to, whatever exists 'naturally'. Tom takes pains to argue that teaching does not exist naturally but rather is infused with presumptions of moral worth and purpose. He discards the framework of process-product inquiry and employs instead the language of social construction. That language also informs the relational and critical approaches Valli identifies. Both articulate desirable ends first, either caring or social transformation, and then import that meaning into teaching to define the latter's moral significance. This methodological tendency is one source of my reservations about all three approaches.

I believe that the task facing researchers and teacher educators interested in the moral dimensions of teaching is not to choose between scientism or positivism on the one hand, or social constructivism on the other. If the former presumes too attenuated a view of human endeavors like teaching, the latter suffers from circular reasoning that can unintentionally cocoon persons within a preordained and determining social or cultural nexus. It is circular to argue that teaching is socially constructed and then turn around and talk about its moral basis when that basis itself is presumed to be socially constructed (i.e., whatever the desirable ends happen to be at the moment). In this viewpoint, the moral reduces to mores, or customary values and ways of regarding and treating other people. This posture does not offer a standpoint for weighing the worth of values beyond the instrumental one of assessing whether those values help us realize our desires — which, however, begs the question of the worth of our desires. The standpoint also inadvertently reduces practices such as teaching into a means to an end, with the end defined apart from the nature of the practice. The untoward consequence is that

teachers and what they do also become means to an end, again with that end potentially having little to do with the nature of the work or with teachers' own understandings and knowledge. The relational and the critical approaches Valli discusses are especially vulnerable to this unintended possibility. Caring or societal transformation are cast as the central, animating motivation in teachers' work. Implicitly, and sometimes even explicitly, teachers are taken as falling short of the moral mark if they do not subscribe to these orienting frameworks.

My concern with the three viewpoints runs even deeper than these specific reservations, which is why I will not be offering in this essay what might be called a fourth approach. I question an unspoken assumption underlying the language of 'different approaches', namely that teachers and teacher educators can in effect choose what counts as the moral dimensions of teaching. The premise of choice stands out most sharply in the deliberative approach, at least as Valli frames it, but the premise haunts the other approaches as well. It threatens to legitimate defining teaching in ways that suit a prevailing ideology rather than doing justice to the nature of the work. The contrast I want to offer is not to adopt a scientific standpoint toward teaching and the moral. Rather, I suggest that teacher educators can derive the moral dimensions of teaching from pondering the practice itself, rather than from having to turn first to particular moral theories or political ideologies, to particular societal or cultural values, or to any other source external to and conceived apart from the work of teachers.

I do not intend to denigrate those sources, which is one reason why I remarked that educators need not turn to them 'first.' There are obvious places for such sources in addressing teaching. For example, philosophy as a domain of inquiry provides invaluable language for the very project in which I am engaged here. Educational scholars have demonstrated the value of philosophical study for understanding teaching and for conducting oneself as a good teacher (see, e.g., Arcilla, 1995; Fenstermacher, 1986, 1992; Garrison, 1997; Proefriedt, 1994). Moral philosophy especially can illuminate both the idea of the moral and the moral aspects of teaching. However, it does not create or define those aspects. It helps clarify them. It does not add

new moral knowledge. It helps us understand what we already know, or what we have overlooked, or what is confusing us.¹ The present essay can be perceived as an attempt to clarify what we know about teaching but often forget or lose sight of in the hurly-burly of a hectic educational world. I do not presume that the argument will be complete, because my thesis exceeds the scope of a single article. I hope the discussion will provoke useful conversation and inquiry, including for teacher educators who wonder how best to engage their candidates in thinking about the moral aspects of teaching.

Teaching as a Practice

Teacher educators might be the first to suggest that the question, What is teaching? will never receive a single answer that satisfies everyone. It is a perennial question and it will persist for as long as teaching endures. However, to suggest that no single, satisfactory answer is available does not mean there is no common ground, no shared sense of what is entailed in the endeavor. Let me offer a working conception of that shared sensibility. It is a conception that is saturated with moral meaning, as will soon be apparent.

The Old English root of the term teaching, *taecan*, means to show, to instruct, to 'provide signs' or 'outward expressions' of something one knows. Teaching means leading or guiding others to know what they did not know before — e.g., the course of historical events or the structure of the solar system. It means helping students to articulate or apprehend what they did not know they knew — e.g., aspects of musical composition which they may have learned unawares over the years. Teaching means assisting or coaching others in how to do things they could not do before — for instance, how to prepare a science experiment or how to position oneself as a goalie in football. Teaching also involves promoting or encouraging attitudes students did not embody before — e.g., to appreciate intellectual discussion with peers rather than just looking for 'the answer'. Finally, teaching means spurring students to reconsider old beliefs in favor of potentially better ones — e.g., that they can think for themselves, that they can accomplish things, and that learning how to do so is worthwhile.

If this beginning outline of teaching is acceptable, while also understood as not exhaustive, it can serve to reveal the moral nature of teaching. Each claim listed here presupposes a notion of better and worse, or, posed differently, a notion of what it means to have access to a potentially richer life. The sheer act of teaching another person something they do not know is usually predicated on the idea that it is good for the person to know it — that, in some perhaps distant or still obscure sense, the person's life will be enhanced for knowing it. From this perspective, it can become unjust, or immoral, to deprive students of knowledge that might assist them in living a good life. A similar point holds with respect to teaching persons how to do things like conduct experiments or play musical instruments: the presumption is that developing these and similar capacities enriches a human life. These capacities are enabling to human beings. They equip them to do new things. They expand rather than contract the horizon of possible experiences in which they can engage. In short, they fundamentally change the kind of persons students might become, and they change them for the good rather than the bad. They invite students to become broad as contrasted with narrow in their outlook on life, with all the consequences that a broadened viewpoint can have for how persons regard and treat other people and their respective strivings.

The final two claims listed above, that teaching fuels new attitudes and sparks new beliefs, are also infused with moral meaning. No serious-minded educator seeks to instill harmful or vicious attitudes in students. Educators and the public alike regard it as immoral to 'teach' others how to steal, to lie, to injure others, or worse. They would render the same judgment on deliberate efforts to prevent students from learning to read, to write, to think, and so forth. As contrasted with harming, corrupting, or short-changing students, teaching means developing students' knowledge. Teaching means promoting enabling attitudes, orientations, and beliefs, the kind that allow students to progress rather than regress as human beings, to grow in both intellectual and moral terms. In short, teaching is steeped in presuppositions about moral goodness and about what it means to live a flourishing life. Teacher educators can serve their candidates well by engaging them in

thinking through these presuppositions (Stengel & Tom, 1995).

The argument thus far can be reduced to two related propositions: that teaching is a moral endeavor, and that teacher educators can derive a framework for addressing its moral meaning directly from the practice itself. I want to clarify what is meant by teaching as a 'practice' (the latter term has taken on nearly as many meanings in our time as the term moral). According to MacIntyre's (1984) well-known position,² a practice is distinct from the institutions in which it is carried out. Practicing medicine, for example, is not identical with working in a hospital. The practice of law is not synonymous with being employed by a law firm. And teaching is not the same thing as working in schools, despite the fact that the bulk of it takes place in those institutions. The practice of teaching is much older than any particular school and will outlast any school or system of schooling in existence today.

What is the practice of teaching? The most immediate thing that can be said is that it differs from other practices. For example, 'helping' young people is not identical with teaching. Barcena, Gill and Jover (1993) argue that 'it is not enough to define the educational relationship as an assistance-based one. The important thing is not merely to be of assistance, but to be of pedagogical assistance. This is what distinguishes an educational relationship from other forms of assistance or help, such as psychological or therapeutic' (p. 246). An adult can be helpful as a parent, a minister, a nurse, a counselor, and so forth. But neither parenting, ministering, nursing, counseling, nor other practices, place both intellectual and moral development at their center in the formal and public ways that teaching does. In the usual course of events, parents, ministers, nurses, and counselors, are not formally responsible for educating other peoples' children. Teachers are. Moreover, because a person may have achieved success in an endeavor like parenting or social work does not imply that the person will be a successful teacher, any more than becoming an accomplished golfer means that one will automatically achieve success at bowling. In short, teaching has its own characteristic set of responsibilities and obligations which practitioners learn through preparing for and enacting the terms of the practice.

At the start of this section I outlined some of those terms: helping others learn things they do not know or do not know how to do, inviting them to take on enabling orientations toward learning, toward themselves, and toward other people, and so forth. Those terms are infused with moral significance. They attest to the fact that teachers work in a practice that calls on them to conduct themselves in particular ways. Teachers do not 'choose' these responsibilities and obligations; they do not 'choose' the moral dimensions of the endeavor. Rather they discover them through pondering and engaging in the work (cf. MacIntyre, 1984; Sandel, 1982). For example, teachers quickly discover, if they are serious-minded, that moral qualities such as patience, attentiveness, and fairness are built into teaching. They find out what it means to treat students as ends in themselves, as embodying a certain dignity not subject to manipulation and coercion (Greene, 1986). They learn what it means to serve and to support students' learning, rather than having students serve them or some need or agenda conceived apart from teachers' inherent obligations (Banner & Cannon, 1997).

Experienced teachers know that there is no blueprint or by-the-numbers moral code that can tell them what to do in a particular context. Students and educational settings differ a great deal, and teachers must constantly use their judgment. There is no single or best way in which to be patient, attentive, and fair-minded, just as there is no single, foolproof way in which to teach a particular subject. But the fact that there exists no formula for how to be patient with or attentive to students does not mean teachers can dispense with such virtues. Those qualities accompany the work of teaching, or else the practice will dissolve into something else. As mentioned previously, philosophical reflection can be invaluable both for clarifying these claims and for assisting teachers in resolving what to do in their particular circumstances. My argument in this section of the essay has been that the language of practice, in helping to frame the nature and terms of teaching, illuminates its moral significance. It helps us appreciate that teachers who elect *not* to meet the responsibilities built into the practice may succeed in remaining in the classroom, but, according to the argument, they will no longer be teaching.

They will be engaged in some other form of human action (often lampooned in Hollywood films about teachers who are seen showboating in the classroom, reading newspapers while their students nap or horse around, and so forth).

As a practice, teaching compels teachers to serve students' growth and development, not because some external authority has declared this to be so, but because of the very nature of the work. The practice obliges teachers to treat students respectfully, at least if we are to talk about teaching rather than about indoctrinating, converting, or commanding. Teaching is a moral endeavor because the practice involves assisting students to broaden their horizons. It entails helping students to become more knowledgeable rather than less so, more interested in learning and in communicating rather than less so, and more expansive in their thinking and in their human sympathies than less so. What Dewey (1916/1966) writes in his well-known study of education — 'Interest in learning from all the contacts of life is the essential moral interest' (p. 360) — could serve as the beginning of a motto for the practice.

The understanding of teaching and its moral dimensions outlined here is as old as the world's first written accounts of the practice. Teachers such as Socrates and Confucius were not engaged in the work merely to serve societal customs or community values and beliefs. They sought to raise questions about human possibility. This historical perspective sheds light on why teaching as a practice seems always to exist in tension with presumptions that teachers should be single-minded advocates of a particular ideology or set of values. When teacher candidates ask the questions, Whose morals? and Why should we be talking about moral matters?, I believe they are tapping into this long-standing tension. It is a worthy issue to take up in the conversation about what it means to teach. To the extent that teachers are performing solely as advocates of a particular ideology or value system, the question can be asked whether they are in fact 'teaching'. They may be doing something different, call it socialization, enculturation, or whatever, which, in the nature of events, may be more highly valued than teaching by a particular society, constituency, or institution. But the fact that it may be more highly valued does not automatically make it teaching.³

The practice of teaching is older than most current ideologies and value systems, just as it is older than our present schools and educational establishments. In contrast with enculturation or socialization, teaching as a practice emerged when individuals first asked questions that took them a step beyond established mores and extant beliefs and values, not necessarily with an eye on rejecting those values and mores, but rather with the hope of understanding them against a broader backdrop than they are themselves capable of providing (cf. Taylor, 1989). The practice of teaching is itself possible, and takes place, only because no society anywhere, at any time, has been perfectly good. Teaching embodies the human endeavor of moving human beings closer to the good, or, posed differently, closer to rather than farther from the prospect of a flourishing life. This suggests that the practice is something other than merely a means of inculcating or passing on particular beliefs, values, and customs, however these are understood. Teaching constitutes an end in its own right, one infused with intellectual and moral promise.

The Moral as Embedded in Teaching

At least three possible criticisms can be lodged against my argument, and I will draw this essay to a close by addressing each of them in turn.

A critic might claim, first, that the idea of teaching as a practice merely represents another set of values that is being imported into teaching. This would mean that the notion of a practice does not avoid a central criticism I levied against what Valli (1990) describes as the deliberative, relational, and critical approaches to conceiving the moral dimensions of teaching. I suggested that all three approaches convey the impression that educators can, in effect, choose or decide what is or what is not moral about teaching, and that, moreover, their decisions or choices can be made with little or no consideration of teaching. Those choices can be governed by moral theories, political ideologies, personal values, or other types of perspective or viewpoint conceived apart from the practice. I have responded to the criticism that my argument is no different in kind by emphasizing that the idea of teaching as a practice does not constitute a 'fourth'

approach, i.e., merely another instance of importing into teaching moral meanings defined apart from it. I have questioned the premise that underlies talk of 'different approaches': namely, that from a moral point of view teaching is an empty cell that awaits filling from some external source.⁴ The language of practice illuminates the fact that teaching is saturated with moral significance. To identify and to describe that significance entails pondering and studying the work itself, first and last. In between, so to speak, resides a place for moral or political theory.

However, the critic might respond with a second objection. He or she might say that my argument is tautological. That is, the critic might contend that the argument posits that the moral is embedded in teaching, but then proceeds to outline that moral content without stepping 'outside' the practice. Posed differently, the critic might argue that I have simply described a set of moral features of teaching and then proceeded to claim that, surprise! we need go no further than to teaching itself to identify and articulate those moral features. This objection resembles the first in that it suggests that I have not avoided the charge of being arbitrary, or at any rate of having some moral meanings (or 'values') in mind beforehand and then trying to find a way to insert them into the work of teaching. My main response to this criticism is that theory is not the only way to derive the moral. The idea of teaching as a practice presumes it has a history and a set of traditions that have infused the work with a broad range of moral meanings. Those meanings come to life in images such as teachers assisting students to broaden rather than to narrow their horizons, to question rather than to swallow opinion and assertion, to listen to rather than to ignore others, and more. The philosophical process of stepping 'outside' the practice can help us in clarifying and appreciating those meanings. But the process can never substitute for them.

In this regard, it bears emphasizing that the language of practice breaks company with the long-standing assumption that to identify the moral in any endeavor, we must first abstract ourselves from it, settle on what is 'moral', and then return to the endeavor to assess it. What is overlooked is that this procedure is itself an endeavor whose worthiness would presumably need some grounding outside it. Immanuel Kant

(e.g., 1775–1780/1799, 1785/1964, 1797/1996) has provided a well-known argument that we can break out of this regress through the use of reason. It is the most persuasive and beautiful argument of which I am aware. However, even Kant took pains to point out that he was not adding anything new to morality. I believe that he saw his project, in part, as strengthening our moral knowledge in the face of skepticism, cynicism, and despair, all of which can be brought about by the continued reality of pain, suffering, and injustice in the world. I have suggested, and have sought to show in this essay, that philosophical analysis can serve to clarify and to recollect what we already know but too often lose sight of about teaching. It is a truism that teaching and learning to teach are difficult endeavors. They often entail failure, confusion, doubt, and sometimes even hopelessness. Part of responding to those conditions is to fashion ways of remembering and renewing the basic terms of the work.⁵

A third criticism follows on the heels of the first two. The critic might worry that regarding teaching as a practice may constitute a monolithic perspective. The language of practice may seem one-sided rather than operating in a spirit of dialogue or conversation with contrasting viewpoints. However, as MacIntyre (1984) underscores, history and tradition in a practice are sources of criticism, not tools for shutting the latter down. History is not dead, and tradition is not traditionalism, a term which helps capture the fear the critic has expressed here. A practice thrives on criticism, debate, dialogue, and multiple voices in the conversation. What I have sought to show is that a meaningful dialogue or conversation presupposes a shared object, in this case, teaching. The object does not come to us hardened or fixed in scope and meaning, any more than a poem, play, novel, or any work of art emerges frozen in its possible meanings.⁶ But the object does indeed come to us, or upon us, as any novice teacher quickly discovers once she has a classroom of her own. The demands of being prepared, of working to support student learning despite challenging conditions, of being alert and fairminded and attentive and more, immediately greet her when she crosses the threshold of the classroom. These demands have emerged historically through the enactment of the practice. As I have suggested, it is certainly

possible to ignore them; but to do so means abandoning the practice in favor of something else.

In this light, what Valli (1990) summarizes as the deliberative, relational, and critical approaches to teaching and the moral all raise valuable questions and perspectives. The idea of rooting the moral dimensions of teaching in the practice rather than in these approaches acknowledges their contributions to the conversation while also steering clear of their limitations. For example, good teaching implies learning to deliberate morally rather than acting blindly or arbitrarily (Fenstermacher, 1992; Hostetler, 1997; Oser et al, 1992; Oser, 1994; Strike & Soltis, 1985; Strike & Ternasky, 1993; Tom, 1984). I have suggested that moral deliberation rests not on the teacher's intuitions or personal values, a presumption Valli ascribes to the deliberative approach, but rather on an understanding of the terms of the work. Those terms oblige teachers to place the intellectual and moral well-being of students first and foremost. As Noddings (1984) makes plain, that posture presumes a quality of caring without which teachers may inadvertently end up serving themselves. The terms of the practice also enable teachers to contribute to societal improvement, not through deconstructive acts or radical critique per se, but through empowering students with the sense of agency that emerges from being taken seriously, from being given opportunities to think and talk independently and reflectively, and more.

The critical approach is the most limited of the three Valli describes for purposes of understanding the moral dimensions of teaching. The approach tends to overlook the daily efforts of teachers because schools are presumed to be fundamentally unjust entities, which means that those who toil within them are seen as contributing to injustice whether aware of doing so or not. This stance stacks the decks against teachers before even considering what it is they might actually be accomplishing or in a position to accomplish. The relational approach is more inhabitable because it recognizes both the possibilities and the limitations in teaching, and because it operates from a basic posture of humility (a crucial virtue in teaching, as serious-minded practitioners would be the first to attest). Valli's criticism that the relational approach contains no 'structural critique' (1990, p. 50)

overlooks the point that meaningful social change, from the point of view of relation, is unlikely to occur unless individuals are disposed to care for those in their immediate worlds. Moreover, a guiding premise of relation is that moral theory and moral practice must be harmonious. Social transformation will not be well served, in the long run, if an entire class of persons — in this case, teachers — are perceived first as instruments of hegemonic control and then as possible instruments of transformation, a view that reduces them in either case into a means to fulfill externally defined ends. From the relational point of view, the moment a person is treated as a means, however estimable the ends, is the moment when future promise is cut short. As we have seen, a major virtue in the idea of teaching as a practice is that it presupposes treating both teachers and students as ends in themselves.

Teachers are well-positioned to examine larger societal issues with students. As the argument here suggests, how they do so can be as important as whether they do so (cf. Burbules & Rice, 1991; Burbules, 1993; Fine, 1993). However, it might pay to recall where teachers have a comparative advantage. Teachers need not seek to resolve societal problems directly, unlike, say, politicians, religious leaders, or community organizers, whose own practices authorize or even oblige them to exhort, preach, and lead. Teachers, by dedicating themselves to good practice day-by-day in the classroom, can indirectly help their students develop the intellectual and moral resources such that they can themselves respond to pressing societal problems that come their way. Over time, teachers' everyday work can invite students to become the kind of persons who are willing to address such problems in the first place. Teachers can build a sense of classroom community through which students learn what it means to study issues and objects in concert with others; what it means to attend, to listen, and to learn from other people; how to develop their own ideas and viewpoints and to share them in ways that fuel communication; how to connect their learning to events and experiences beyond the school; in short, to appreciate the meaning of dwelling in ethical community with other human beings who differ from them in many ways. The classroom—the teacher's primary world—has endless potential

for these forms of intellectual and moral learning. When they are realized, the experience alone can provide students invaluable perspective on how to think about and tackle societal problems and concerns.

These remarks constitute another way of saying that the moral meanings in teaching do not have to be imported from outside the practice. Rather, they accompany the act of teaching. As such, they are not conditional. They are not dependent upon shifts in societal mores or beliefs and values. Nor does their relevance wax or wane depending on the age level of students, their background, or the subject being taught, although these and other contextual factors will influence how teachers respond to the moral obligations in the work. This last point discloses the fact that the practice of teaching does articulate with evolving societal mores, beliefs, and values, many of which find their way into the workplaces in which teachers engage their students. The argument here does not imply an hermetic, self-contained image of the practice. Such an image would be ironic, at the very least, given the emphasis throughout on teaching's role in broadening and expanding students' intellectual and moral horizons. To perform that work, teachers will need to be cognizant of their students' current horizons.

However, to 'articulate' teaching with societal mores and values does not mean subordinating it to them. The latter term echoes MacIntyre's (1984) sobering analysis of the tensions that typically exist between a practice and the societal institutions in which it is housed. It also evokes arguments by Gutmann (1987) and others that teachers, to the extent that they are striving to fulfill the terms of the practice, merit genuine autonomy and support. A full-blown analysis that roots the moral dimensions of teaching in the practice, rather than outside it, would need to address such tensions.

For now, I believe this much can be said: with respect to teaching, the source of an answer to a question teacher candidates sometimes ask is not hard to find. Whose morals? They are those embedded in the practice itself. They belong to teachers, just as teachers belong to them. The moral is *in* the practice. The moral meaning of teaching can be derived from the basic terms of the work itself. Teachers need not grop elsewhere first, outside the practice, to find their

moral bearings in their work with the young. Teaching means attending to students, listening to them, speaking with them in intellectually serious ways, identifying their strengths and weaknesses with an eye on supporting the former and overcoming the latter, and more. For most teachers, those are not easy things to do. They must be learned, renewed, remembered. They are why entering the practice of teaching and taking on its many obligations has been and will continue to be a moral odyssey for every new teacher. That odyssey can be a bit less hazardous, while remaining infinitely complex, if teachers are mindful of what lends their practice its distinctive moral meaning.

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Notes

¹ Many philosophers have themselves argued that moral inquiry does not add brand new knowledge but rather illuminates and helps provide grounds for what we know. As Immanuel Kant (1788/1993) famously posed the matter, 'Who would want to introduce a new principle of morality and, as it were, be its inventor, as if the world had hitherto been ignorant of what duty is or had been thoroughly wrong about it?' (p. 8).

² MacIntyre's view has generated an enormous amount of discussion in moral philosophy (see, e.g., Horton & Mendus, 1994). Olson (1992) has made extensive use of MacIntyre's framework in a study that focuses on the virtues embedded in good teaching, and Arnold (1997) has undertaken a similar analysis in a study of sport, ethics, and education.

³ Some contrasts with teaching may help illuminate this claim. For example, many persons in American society worry about euthanasia. Their troubles have been sparked, in part, by repeated headlines about Dr. Kevorkian and his assistance in helping terminally ill patients commit suicide. In light of the argument here, a possible position one could

take would be to say that Dr. Kevorkian — the 'Dr.' notwithstanding — is not engaged in the practice of medicine. That practice, as it has emerged over the millennia, is life-affirming and life-sustaining. It does not involve the intentional ending of life on command. When a doctor engages in terminating life, without considering the range of options available, that person is no longer engaged in the practice. He or she is doing something else which, again, may be more highly valued than adhering to the terms of the practice. But the fact that assisting people to commit suicide may be highly valued does not make that act commensurate with the practice of medicine. An extreme but familiar example from education might also be helpful. It severely compromises the idea of teaching to admit that totalitarian regimes are engaged in the practice, rather than (as totalitarianism means) in indoctrinating minds and corrupting hearts. From this point of view, one could argue that the terms Stalinist teacher and Nazi teacher are oxymorons. Such persons are doing something other than teaching.

⁴ In a lucid analysis, Fenstermacher (1986) distinguishes between what he calls the 'root' and 'elaborated' senses of teaching. The root sense derives from answering the question 'What is teaching?' The elaborated senses (there is no single 'sense' here) derives from answers to the question 'What is good teaching?' Fenstermacher suggests that it is easier to reach agreement about the root meaning of teaching — a process which might include contrasting teaching with other human endeavors — than it is about what he calls the elaborated meanings. This is in part because the root meaning carries no necessary moral content, while elaborated meanings do.

The language of practice I am employing dissolves the kind of distinction Fenstermacher makes. The practice of teaching can only be described through morally freighted terms. From the point of view of a practice, teaching embodies standards of excellence and moral goodness which are constantly being questioned and reformulated from within (as teachers might be the first to point out), in part as a response to external demands and pressures. For example, teachers must find ways to balance their commitment to the terms of the practice with the need to be responsive to administrative and parental agendas. Although MacIntyre (1984) does not address teaching, his discussion of a practice sheds helpful light on these matters.

⁵ This claim mirrors an analysis of teaching as a calling or vocation (Hansen, 1995), a study centered around the work and viewpoints of four highly regarded teachers who teach in a diverse, urban setting. The entire argument in this essay derives from thinking about these and other serious-minded practitioners.

⁶ Gadamer (1960/1996) provides extensive support for the idea that tradition is not the heavy-handed or conservative phenomenon so often associated with the term in our era. In Gadamer's analysis of interpretation, tradition becomes a source of critique of and, possibly, even freedom from the unacknowledged prejudices embedded in current forms of thinking.

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